

And so she lived on, surrounded by her insect friends, loving them, understanding them, calling each one by his Christian name, and quite happy in their society. There was a big dragon-fly with spotted wings whom she addressed as Horace, and who, she declared, had followed her weeks ago all the way from Streeter's Pond as she drove home with her old mare and the buck-board. And as she dwelt upon the salient points of his character, his sense of humour and comical disposition, while he whizzed about her head, I declare he did look to me quite unlike other dragon-flies. I seemed to see a humorous twinkle in his big eyes, and for the moment firmly believed in Horace's sense of the ludicrous.

Aunt Randy and I soon became warm friends, and it was not long before she told me her story. I need not dwell upon the early part of it. Her married life was a hard one, her husband a shiftless, idle vagabond. She did not apply these epithets, but the facts spoke for themselves. She worked hard, and he spent her earnings at the tavern. They had one child, a boy, and to him the mother's heart clung as to nothing else in earth or heaven. For his sake she struggled on, bore her husband's neglect and ill-treatment, worked for all three, and kept some little remnant of faith and hope in her heart. At last one winter's day her husband went away and never returned. Some weeks later she heard of his death, and was free. Just then a distant relative, of whom she had lost sight for many years, died and left her a little money; so new hopes sprang up in her chilled heart. She would take the child, she thought, buy a little place in some quiet village, and leave her wretched past far behind her. Alas for human hopes! Just as the little house in Franconia was secured, and she was about to remove there with her child, the boy sickened and died.

If I should write pages I could not convey to you, as the few abrupt words of this patient, undemonstrative New England woman conveyed to me, all the tragic meaning of that loss to her. As a child she had lived in a Christian home, and had some religious training, and amid all her trials hitherto she had tried in her poor blind way to believe and trust and think that somehow things were for the best. But now, with this terrible blow, all faith in God and man was killed. She buried the boy with no more thought or hope of a future reunion than has the veriest heathen, left his grave and their old home—a grave, too, now in which all hope and faith were entombed—and came to Franconia, where she lived for months the solitary life of which Nathan had told me, a misanthropic, hopeless soul. Let me try now to tell you in Aunt Randy's own words, as near as they may be, how the change came.

"I used to shet myself up here all day an' think. I couldn't have no posy gard'n or anything like that, now the little feller wa'n't here to play in it. An' I couldn't bear to hear the birds singin', 'cause he used to like 'em so, an' I'd jest shet up my eyes as I went along so's not to see the vi'lets an' dand'lions an' butter-